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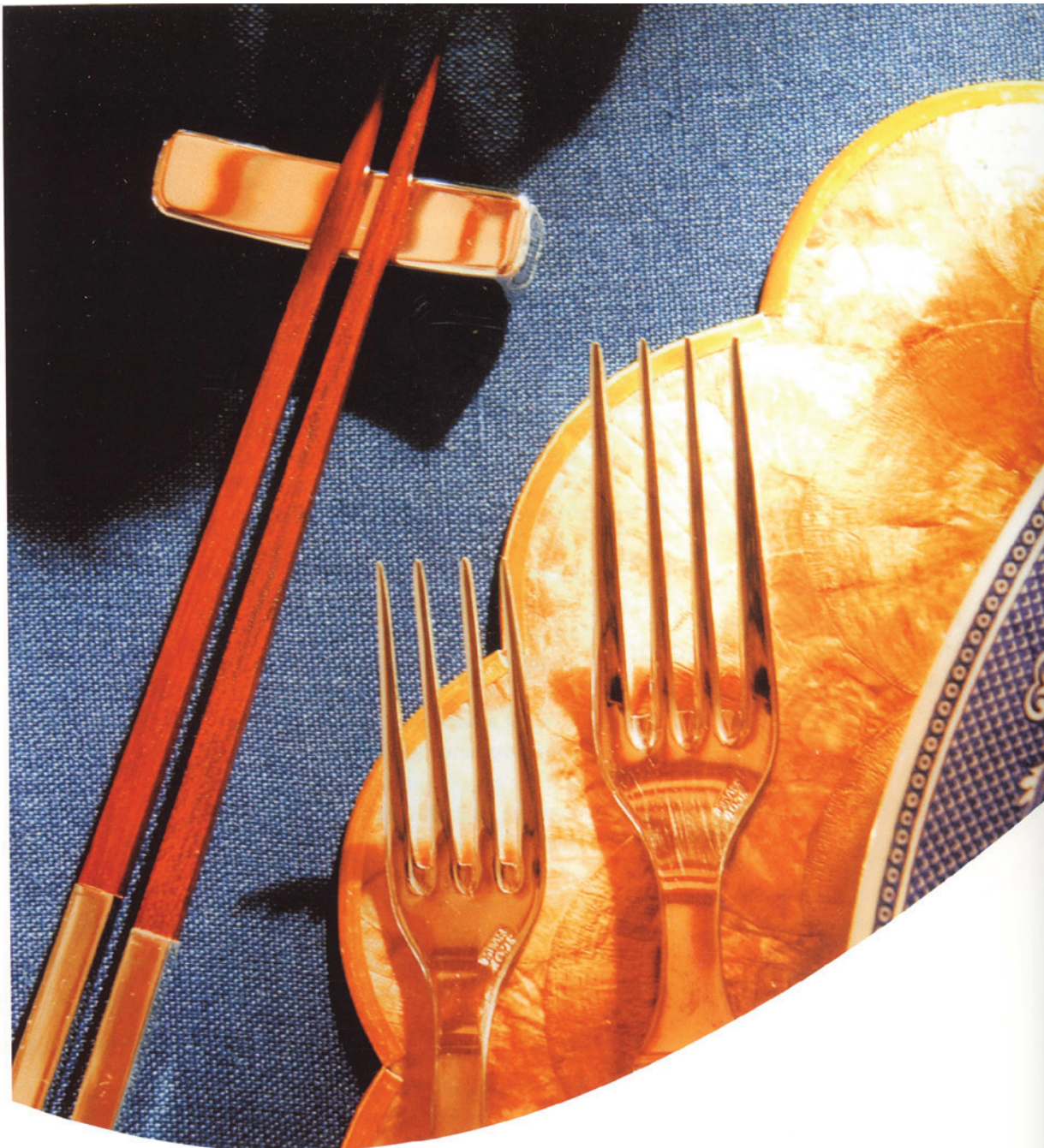
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► **HAVING TRAVELED
EXTENSIVELY
THROUGHOUT**

ASIA, Chef Michael Rueggeberg brings the flavors of the East to Elaine Rosenberg's "Pearls of Asia" party in Aspen. "As a Westerner, I fell in love with the unfamiliar flavors and taste combinations of Asian cuisine so I always enjoy creating a rich, diverse, and intriguing menu that honors the wide variety of Oriental cooking styles."



a taste of aspen

Bringing Global Cuisine to the Rocky Mountains, One Dinner Party at a Time

 by Christine Coffin

michael Rueggeberg inherited a love of food from his mother and grandmother. His passion found him wearing his toque in Switzerland, Bavaria, the Cayman Islands, Austria, and in several South American, Caribbean, and US ports of call while working for a cruise line. Along the way, the German-born chef picked up culinary skills that represented a number of cultures.

from executive sous chef to celebrated personal chef

Rueggeberg and his wife, Christine, eventually landed in the world-renowned ski town of Aspen, Colorado, also home to more than 30 CEOers. There, as the executive sous chef in the kitchen of the legendary Little Nell Hotel and the executive chef in the popular Colony Restaurant's kitchen, he learned firsthand about his Aspen clientele's palette.

"There is an impression of Aspen being fancy," he said, "but really, it is a jeans town where everyone comes to unwind and kick back. You would be surprised to know that, even though people coming to Aspen are high rollers, they don't always want fancy food. I have found over the years that what they do want is basic, good tasting, and delicious food that looks good on the plate."

As Rueggeberg made a name for himself in the chic town of only 8,000 affluent full- and part-time residents, more and more customers began to ask him to cook dinner parties for them in their homes. Rueggeberg delighted in the opportunity to come out of the restaurant kitchen to share his love of food in the residents' kitchens, with them as well as with their guests.

"[I]t gave me an opportunity to sow my talents as a personal chef," he said.

Over time, Rueggeberg has become one of Aspen's most sought-after private chefs. In this role, he collaborates with clients to create a menu for each occasion. He also shops for ingredients in Aspen's fine grocery stores and farmer's markets, waving to familiar faces as he fills his cart. And as guests arrive at a client's home, Rueggeberg is in the kitchen,

ready to invite extra hands to join him, demonstrate a cooking technique, or answer questions about the origins and cultural significance of an ingredient.

beautifully-themed tables and regionally-inspired cuisine

Today, Rueggeberg is kept busy by eight clients, including **Elaine Rosenberg**, wife of CEOer **Marvin Rosenberg**. Together, she and Rueggeberg have created a series of weekly dinner parties with beautifully-themed tables and regionally-inspired cuisine, all held in the Rosenbergs' Aspen home.

Rueggeberg and Rosenberg begin by collaborating on a party theme, which can range from "Midnight in Morocco" or "Evening in Provence" to "Birds of Paradise" or "Buddha Bar."

Once the theme is selected, Rueggeberg takes the lead with the cuisine.

"I go to the grocery store to see what is fresh and available," he said. "Especially when you live in a mountain town, it is difficult and tricky to find fresh produce, meat products, or seafood because all of it has to be trucked or flown in."

After researching for the "Taste of Tuscany" menu, for example, he came up with Potato Gnocchi with Wild Spinach, Portobello Mushrooms, Shallots and White Truffle Oil, Tri-Colored Tomato Salad with Buffalo Mozzarella, and finished it with a tasty Baked Ricotta and Mascarpone Tart with Vanilla Bean Ice Cream and White Cappuccino Biscotti.

"These are [the] classic dishes reflecting the Tuscan region that are always popular," he said.

Meanwhile, Rosenberg tackles the guest list, which typically includes 10



▶ establishing a tradition

Elaine Rosenberg's daughter, **Anita**, recently paid tribute to her mother and Michael's ability to captivate guests by publishing *Thursdays with Mom & Michael*. A guide for aspiring hosts and hostesses who want to establish a dinner party tradition of their own, the book chronicles Rosenberg's celebrated Thursday night dinner parties in Aspen, with all of the author's proceeds donated directly to The Breast Cancer Research Foundation founded by its chairman, **Evelyn Lauder**, senior corporate vice president of The Estée Lauder Companies and wife of CEOer **Leonard Lauder**. ☺

new guests each week, some who know each other and others who don't.

"I love mixing it up," she said. "Although I love to throw large events, I prefer small, intimate gatherings where people get a chance to really connect."

She also spends a great deal of time on the décor and ambience, where she is not afraid to play and take risks.

"MORE is MORE," she said. "I love juxtaposing pattern on pattern, because I never follow the rules and am not part of the less-is-more school of thought. Patterns, prints, and colors are my playground, and I have a reputation of creating a visual feast for the eyes with décor that someone else might not normally think to put together."

“There is an impression of Aspen being fancy, but really, it is a jeans town where everyone comes to unwind and kick back.”



◀ **BORN IN GERMANY**, Ruggenberg has traveled the world perfecting his art. "Becoming a chef was the only job I ever wanted to do. Not a pilot. Not a race car driver. Only a chef!"

For Tuscany, she combined paisley print napkins with Italian pottery and served Chianti in colorfully painted glass decanters normally used for flowers.

"If you get excited and have fun creating your tablescape, your guests will enjoy it too," she said.

For Rosenberg and Ruggenberg, the well-known and wildly popular Aspen tradition is a formula that works well.

"Elaine and I have been throwing parties together for so long that she never tells me what to cook," said Ruggenberg. "And I never tell her how to set a tabletop. We work very well together hand in hand."

This August, Ruggenberg will join forces with Jon and Barbara Lee to provide CEOers with a taste of Aspen at the Aspen Family Seminar. 🍷